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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version
Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

afrika spectrum 39 (2004) 2: 223 – 248

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Christof Hartmann[1]

Abstract

With the recent wave of democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa a new interest in elected local councils has appeared. It is also increasingly underlined by research, both from the field of development theory / politics and from comparative research on democratisation processes. These broader arguments are narrowed down by concentrating on local electoral rules, with a geographical focus on the countries of Southern Africa. The contribution presents data for all Southern African countries on the types of elected bodies at sub-national level of government, the composition of local councils, the regularity and simultaneity of local and national elections, the electoral systems and the rules governing candidature at the local level. Electoral rules are just one set of institutions that matter in local politics, and there is no doubt that other variables (such as local administration, resource allocation or capacity-building) are equally important. But the assumption is that local electoral institutions are relevant for the democratisation of both local *and* national politics, and should thus merit closer scrutiny. The comparative study of different countries offers additional insights into similarities or specific constraints and problems that countries face in organising local elections, as well as into the institutional solutions that they eventually opted for.

Keywords

Local Democracy, Local Government, Local Elections, Southern Africa, Political Institutions, Local Councils, Regional Councils, Electoral Systems, Political Parties

1 The contribution builds on empirical research made possible by a research grant of the German Research Association (DFG). The author visited South Africa, Zambia, Namibia, Malawi, and Mauritius . Previous versions of the paper were presented at a Workshop on Local Government in Lilongwe, Malawi, in April 2002, and at the Annual Conference of the African Studies Association in Washington, December 2002. My sincere thanks to all discussants and my colleagues at the Institute of Development Research and Development Policy in Bochum as well as two anonymous referees of this journal for their helpful comments.

Introduction

Although local councils have existed in most African countries ever since colonial times, they have enjoyed a brief and fragile life as institutions of democratic representative government. African leaders - and scientists - challenged their very existence, and councils were abolished, or, where they remained in existence, transformed soon after independence into bodies with very limited powers and autonomy. Local and regional councils were perceived as a political threat to national governments, or as a barrier to the realisation of national development plans.[2] Many African regimes also intervened in the affairs of sub-national councils in response to allegations of corruption and inefficiency.

It is with the more recent wave of democratisation in Sub-Saharan Africa that a new interest in elected local councils has appeared. Again, only when developments in the capital cities began to lose their centrality for understanding the politics of any particular country did social scientists begin to take an interest in sub-national problems and institutions. Over the past few years, the importance of local government in promoting democracy has been emphasised by both national actors and the international community. Its significance has also been increasingly underlined by research, both from the field of development theory / politics and from comparative research on democratisation processes.

From the perspective of *development theory*, a democratic local political process is considered to be important for effective local governance (cf. Wunsch / Olowu 1990; Mawhood 1993, Manor 1995, Rothchild 1996, Smith 1996, Olowu 1999). Substantial decentralisation efforts may simply be unsustainable or weakened by the absence of political mechanisms to hold local officials accountable for their performance. The local political process provides an arena for political actors to explain and market their activities, to build support and raise additional resources (Wunsch 1998). When they fail in the eyes of the local community, the electoral process is the mechanism that replaces them. One main difference between deconcentration and devolution (in the terminology first introduced by Cheema / Rondinelli 1984) is the political management of sub-national institutions by locally elected politicians instead of appointed administrators. Usually, a democratic local political process includes an active civil society, some general political organisations, a legislative arena constituted in elections, and mechanisms to gather and spread information.

2 During the 1970s and 1980s, various theoretical approaches similarly suggested a national framework for analysis in which sub-national councils would be viewed not by themselves but always in the context of their place within the larger and changing political systems or within the developmental setting of a specific region.

Electoral participation is thus one type of political participation among others. For many years, development research has been mainly concerned with social movements' search for non-formalized channels of political participation, or with the involvement of target groups within projects. The increased legitimacy of representative institutions brought about by the democratisation of national political systems has led national and international actors to reconsider the relevance of formalized electoral local institutions for development (Rauch 2002).

Comparative empirical research on *democratisation processes* has enormously expanded our knowledge about the role of democratic institutions in shaping political outcomes. Much of this literature is based on the assumption that democratic governance and the conscious design of political institutions is a key factor affecting the likelihood of democratic consolidation, political stability and of sustainable settlements of violent conflicts (cf. Sartori 1994, Harris / Reilly 1998, Bunce 2000, Reynolds 2001). In stark contrast to the euphoria over institutional engineering in Eastern and Central Europe and East Asia and the long-standing belief of Latin American elites that institutional reforms may indeed improve democratic performance and prospects of consolidation, the discourses on democracy in Africa tended to be concentrated more on the quality of leadership and political elites (i.e. actors), and on economic macro-structural conditions. Only recently did constitution-makers and scholars start to think about reforms of the institutional arrangements that have been put in place at independence or with democratisation (see Barkan 1996, Reynolds 1999, Bogaards 2003). Still, this body of literature has an exclusive focus on national institutions, such as presidentialism or the parliamentary electoral system (cf. Nohlen / Krennerich / Thibaut 1999, Cowen / Laakso 2002).

Local politics and local democratisation have, on the contrary, rarely been discussed in terms of specific institutional settings and designs. Decentralisation of political power and administrative competencies is certainly an established field of research, but analysis is often more concerned with administration than with politics, or, to put it differently, more interested in structures that can provide an effective 'output' (i.e. delivering benefits to local populations), than in representative 'input' (guaranteeing effective political participation). The analysis of linkages between local politics and national politics is generally lacking in accounts both of democratisation and of decentralization processes.[3]

The analysis of elected local and regional councils thus offers a focal point for the study of broader questions of political participation, representation and democratic consolidation (see also Atkinson 1997). In this paper, these broader argu-

3 One notable exception is Mamdani (1996) whose 'bifurcated' state captures the distinct trajectory of the urban 'citizen' state and the rural 'subject' state. Mamdani's interest is, however, to stress the common legacy of African states. He consequently downplays the institutional distinctions between different countries.

ments will be narrowed down in two ways. We will concentrate on local electoral rules, and the geographical focus will be on the countries of Southern Africa. Electoral rules are just one set of institutions that matter in local politics, and there is no doubt that other variables (such as local administration, resource allocation or capacity-building) are equally important.[4] But the assumption is that local electoral institutions matter for the democratisation of both local *and* national politics, and should thus merit closer scrutiny. The comparative study of different countries offers additional insights into similarities or specific constraints and problems that countries face in organising local elections, as well as into the institutional solutions that they eventually opted for.

The next section presents data for all Southern African countries[5] on a) the types of elected bodies at sub-national level of government, b) the composition of local councils, c) the regularity and simultaneity of local and national elections, d) the electoral systems and e) the rules governing candidature at the local level.[6] The collection of systematic and comprehensive up-to date information on local electoral rules proved to be very difficult.[7]

In the remaining part of the article some likely consequences and impacts of these (differing) rules on the respective political processes of these countries will be explored, and several issues will be highlighted that may be of relevance to broader arguments about the viability and consolidation of democratic politics in the region, both at local and national level.

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4 Dahl (1998) and other political scientists have also warned that institutional design might have few impact if the contexts are fluid and the political process weakly institutionalised.

5 Southern Africa is defined here according to membership in the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). Not included are Angola, Democratic Republic of Congo, Seychelles and Swaziland where no local elections are held.

6 Additional electoral rules concerning the organizational aspects of elections at the local level and provisions for suffrage are not included. Suffrage is normally not an issue in debates about local elections. In many European countries local elections are used to experiment with a more liberal regulation of suffrage, i.e., offering migrants not holding the citizenship the right to vote, or extending the vote to people not having reached the age of 18, but 16. For aspects of electoral organization cf. Pottie (2001).

7 Data presented are based on Sharma (1999) for Botswana, Wallis (1999) for Lesotho; Kaunda (1999) for Malawi, Weimer / Fandrych (1999) and Fandrych (2001) for Mozambique, Dukhira (1999) for Mauritius, Toetemeyer (1999) and Keulder (2002) for Namibia, Atkinson (1998) and de Visser et al. (2000) for South Africa, Mukandala (1995), Mushi (1995) and Liviga / Mfunda (1999) for Tanzania, Maipose (1999) for Zambia, and Makumbe (1999) for Zimbabwe. These secondary sources were updated and cross-checked with data provided from experts in SADC countries, new electoral and local government laws, and from the EISA Resource Centre in Johannesburg and the Internet. In five countries (South Africa, Namibia, Malawi, Mauritius, Zambia) interviews held with councillors, mayors, administrators, the relevant ministries, and electoral commissions were used to further verify information. Factual errors and recent modification of rules can however not be excluded.

What is important in comparing local elections?

Types and tiers of sub-national government

Southern African states vary widely in their institutional arrangements at the sub-national level. Local and regional authorities differ substantially in population and area, resources and the extent of discretionary authority. They also differ – and this is the main focus of this paper – in the role given to elected institutions in sub-national government.

In the SADC countries the role of elected councils varies along two dimensions: the number of elected sub-national tiers of government, and the uniformity of electoral rules across the rural-urban divide.

Number of elected sub-national tiers: Most Southern African states have a single tier of elected sub-national authorities. The provincial and regional level may be important in terms of development planning and administrative deconcentration, but is generally lacking in separate representative institutions.[8] Only two of the Southern African states, Namibia and South Africa, have popular elections for representatives at the local *and* the regional level: In South Africa, municipalities with elected councils exist side-by-side with provinces of a quasi-federal status characterised by own parliaments and executives. In the wake of independence, Namibia created new multi-ethnic regions bridging the former homelands and former exclusively white-controlled commercial areas. The Namibian population thus votes both for local councils (municipalities, towns and villages) and regional councils.

Territorial scope: The socio-economic and demographic disparities between urban areas on the one hand, and scattered rural settlements on the other, lead to differences in service needs as well as in the availability of resources. Cities and urban settlements have thus historically been provided with special arrangements for their governance. Nearly all SADC countries therefore have two or more classes of local authorities, with the urban ones granted more power and responsibility than the rural ones. Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe follow this model, with the rural authorities being called *districts*, and the urban ones *cities* and *towns* (and in some cases *townships*). There are important differences in the electoral constitution of these authorities. In Botswana, Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe, district (rural) and urban councils are both directly elected. Citizens living under the jurisdiction of cities and towns elect their urban councillors; the population living in the rural areas elect their district councillors. The same electoral rules apply for both types of authorities and – with the exception of Zimbabwe – district and urban councils are determined in a single local election held on the totality

8 In some of the SADC states, additional village or ward committees may be elected.

of the national territory.[9] In Mozambique (and Lesotho), only urban areas have elected councils, and so far elections have been held only in selected municipalities (Lesotho: Maseru; Mozambique: 33 out of 544 municipalities). In both countries, the population of rural settlements that do not meet the legal requirements (with regard to infrastructure, economic activity, population density etc.) is thus deprived of any democratic representation at sub-national level.

Table 1: Sub-national government systems and elected councils[a]

		Territorial Scope (Horizontal Dimension)	
		Uniform Approach[b]	Urban Approach[b]
Intensity (Vertical Dimension)	2 sub-national tiers elected	South Africa	Namibia
	1 sub-national tier elected	Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe	Lesotho, Mozambique

a Local councils are not formally elected in Angola and Swaziland.
b Uniform Approach' means that the whole national territory is divided in local governments, and all of these local governments have elected councils that are governed by the same legal instrument. ‚Urban Approach' means that elected local governments exist only in urban areas, while rural areas may have no local government at all or administrative sub-units without elected representatives.

Table 1 summarises the differences: It accounts for the distinction along the vertical axis (whether elected councils exist only at the local level or at the local and regional level) and for the distinction along the horizontal axis (whether within the same tier a uniform approach to elected local government is applied, or whether elections are held only in urban areas).

We see that South Africa and Namibia have different elected institutions at the sub-national level. South Africa applies a relatively uniform classification of municipalities (following the transformation of local government in the

9 In Mauritius, the rural population elects village councils that in turn elect indirectly the district councils and chairmen. This system is currently under revision and will most likely be modified in the sense of local government systems existing in the other countries, i.e. bigger districts with councillors directly elected by the population.

late 1990s).[10] Except for the seven metropolitan cities and some sparsely populated District Management Areas (DMA), there is a single type of municipality governed by a single legal document.[11] Namibia, on the other hand, holds local elections only in municipalities, towns and villages. According to Namibian terminology, municipalities are urban areas that existed before independence in 1989, while the towns were created in the former communal areas after independence.[12] The rural population is represented exclusively at the regional level (in the form of the regional councillor for their constituency). These regional councils, in contrast to the district councils of the other SADC countries, are however not the exclusive representative institution of rural populations, but a separate tier of government and represent both the rural and urban population living in that region.

A third dimension to classify local governments in the SADC region would be the actual competencies of sub-national institutions. There are astonishingly few systematic comparisons, but the main problem is obviously which criteria to take into account. There are at least three main criteria to be distinguished: a) the scope of substantive areas or functions sub-national governments are concerned with, b) the staffing system, i.e. the authority to appoint, promote and fire personnel, and c) the financial resources that the decentralized government is entitled to. SADC countries vary enormously with regard to these three criteria, with the South African municipalities having general competencies to undertake any function for the good of their area, provided it is not the prerogative of central government, while Lesotho and Mauritius limit local government to basic municipal services (such as waste management or street lightning).[13]

Elected and non-elected members and institutions

This section deals with two different aspects: What offices are filled in local elections? And are there any non-elected members in otherwise elected institutions?

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10 For a summary of the process of local government transformation in South Africa see Atkinson (1998) and Goetz (1996).

11 In local elections all citizens living in the metropolitan cities and municipalities elect their local councillors while the populations of DMA vote their representatives to District Councils which are then filled up by representatives of the municipalities existing within that district.

12 The 'old towns' (municipalities) have thus established traditions of self-government and more administrative staff. In the 15 years since independence some of the new towns (cf. Rundu or Oshakati) have grown much bigger (in terms of population and financial resources) than most of the municipalities, but the Namibian government has not regrouped the urban areas yet (cf. Simon 1996, Toetemeyer 1999, Piermay / Sohn 1999).

13 For lack of space it is impossible to present a detailed overview of the different competencies of local government in all SADC countries. A basic overview is given by the different country chapters in Reddy (1999).

Direct elections of mayors: In most SADC countries the traditional British type of local government prevails: Local elections are held in order to constitute a local council or representative organ, which in its first session (or at regular intervals) elects a mayor or chairman from among the councillors. The mayor or chairman is the political head of local government, while the management of the local administration is left to a professional manager (called town clerk or Chief Executive Officer / CEO). Political power and control resides with the Council, not with the Mayor or Chairman.[14]

A direct election of mayors is therefore rare in Southern Africa, but was introduced in Mozambique (from 1998) and Zimbabwe (from 1995). Direct election of mayors is limited to the bigger cities (municipalities and cities in the Zimbabwean terminology, urban municipalities in Mozambique). In all other states, the 'integrated' system of indirect election of mayors from among councillors is applied. The direct election of mayors was a substantial issue, especially in the South African debate, but the adherents of indirect election (and of party-political control) prevailed, and even in the metropolitan cities, such as Johannesburg or Cape Town, the mayor is thus elected from among councillors. The importance of direct elections is of course closely linked to the type of electoral system applied, as well as to the effective power of the mayor, which – as outlined above - may vary considerably. In Malawi, both the direct election of mayors by the population (and the merging of administrative and political functions within a unified executive), and the appointment of mayors by central government from among councillors was discussed, but eventually discarded in favour of the present 'indirect election' model.[15]

Non-elected Councillors: Most countries of the region have some form of elected council at the local level. Indeed, any major reform of local politics that neglects popularly elected councils is hardly conceivable. But in a number of states, as in Botswana or Zimbabwe, the central government still has the power to nominate and appoint additional members to the local councils.[16] This practice may often be aimed at incorporating constituency MPs (elected to national parliament) or traditional ethnic community leaders into municipal councils, but sometimes party-political interests are dominant. In Botswana, the National Assembly has empowered the President to appoint an unspecified number of additional councillors, thereby enabling the ruling Botswana Democratic Party to have majority control of any district councils captured by regionally-based op-

14 For an introduction to different local government systems see Olowu (1988) and Humes (1991). A brief overview on the different types of local government existing in Germany is given by Wolff (1995).

15 I am indebted to my colleague Augustine Magolowondo for providing me with this information.

16 In most cases special interest groups and ex officio members have no voting rights.

position groups. Other considerations prevail in Tanzania, where the national Parliament - in the light of the poor electoral success of women - determined by law that more than 25% of the total number of seats of any local council were to be held by appointed female councillors. These women's seats are divided among the political parties in proportion to their share of seats in the respective local council.

Table 2: Non-elected members of local councils

	trad. Leaders	National MPs from local constituency	Women or youth or special interest groups
Botswana	x		
Lesotho	x		
Malawi	x	x	x
Mauritius	No appointed members in local councils		
Mozambique	No appointed members in local councils		
Namibia	No appointed members in local councils		
South Africa	x[a]		
Tanzania		x	x
Zambia		x	
Zimbabwe	x		x

a Only in the provinces that include former homelands.

Simultaneity and regularity of local elections

Most African countries organize separate elections to determine the composition of sub-national councils. Among the SADC countries only Botswana and Tanzania hold 'tripartite' elections, i.e. the voters elect the President, the National Assembly and local councils on the same day, although there exist separate ballot papers for national and local office bearers. Other countries planned to conduct simultaneous elections, but in the case of Malawi, logistical and administrative obstacles prevented the government from executing this intention in 1999 and in 2004. In both cases, local elections were postponed by about a year (to 2000 and 2005 respectively). In Zambia local councils and the national parliament have different terms of office (three and five years respectively), but whenever the end of the terms coincides, elections are held simultaneously. This happened in December 2001. All other SADC countries that hold sub-national elections have separate electoral processes: This is the case in Mozambique and South Africa. Namibia holds separate elections for regional and local councillors. Consequently, in 1998-1999, the Electoral commission had to organize three different ballots within less than two years. Zimbabwe and Mauritius hold separate elections for the different types of local councils that exist in the country, i.e. village / district councils and urban councils. As a rule, local elections are held in the

whole country on a single day, and any deviation from this rule has to be justified by exceptional circumstances.

Table 3: Simultaneity and regularity of elections in the SADC region

	Angola	**Botswana**	**Lesotho**	**Malawi**	**Mauritius**	**Mozambique**
1990						
1991					Pa 15/9 L 27/10[a]	
1992	Pr 29-30/9 Pa 29-30/9			Pa 26/6	**L 30/8[b]**	
1993			Pa 27/3			
1994		Pa 15/10 **L 15/10**		Pr 17/5 Pa 17/5		Pr 27-29/10 Pa 27-29/10
1995			**L 10-11/8**		Pa 20/11	
1996					**L 27/10[a]**	
1997					**L 31/8[b]**	
1998			Pa 23/5			**L 30/06**
1999		Pa 22/10 **L 22/10**		Pr 15/6 Pa 15/6		Pr 3-4/12 Pa 3-4/12
2000				**L 21/11**	Pa 11/9	
2001					**L 7/10[a]**	
2002			Pa 25/5			
2003						**L 19/11**
Next L	Unknown	October 2004	Unknown	Nov 2005	2006	2008

Pr = Presidential Elections; Pa = Parliamentary Elections; L = Local Elections.
a Elections for Urban Councils.
b Elections for Village Councils (and District Councils)

We also see from table 3 that the electoral terms of local councils are much less regular than those of national parliaments and offices. There is hardly any African state where, for various reasons (i.e. lack of legal regulations, lack of resources), local elections have not been postponed at some time. Reasons may be found in the lack of political interest by the ruling party, lack of financial means or constitutional guarantees. Most recently local elections have been postponed in Malawi (to 2005), Mauritius (to 2006), and Namibia (from February 2003 to February 2004 and then again to May 2004). The extension of terms often presents major challenges for the management of local development programmes, the budgeting processes, the availability and commitment of local councillors, and the overall legitimacy of local democracy.

Table 3: Simultaneity and regularity of elections in the SADC region (continued)

	Namibia	South Africa	Swaziland	Tanzania	Zambia	Zimbabwe
1990				Pr 28/10 Pa 28/10		Pr 28-30/3 Pa 28-30/3
1991					Pr 31/10 Pa 31/10	**L 23-24/8[a]**
1992	**L/R 30/11-2/12**				**L 30/11**	
1993			Pa 12/10			**L 26-28/9[b]**
1994	Pa 7-8/12 Pr 7-8/12	Pa 26-29/4 **R 26-29/4**		**L 30/10**		
1995		**L 1-2/11**		Pr 29/10 Pa 29/10		Pa 8-9/4 **L 28-29/10[a]**
1996		**L 6/5+29/5**			Pr 18/11 Pa 18/11	Pr 16-17/3
1997						
1998	**L 16/02** **R 30/11**		Pa 14-28/10		**L 30/12**	**L 26-28/9[b]**
1999	Pa 30/11 Pr 30/11	Pa 2/6 **R 2/6**				
2000		**L 2/12**		Pr 29/10 Pa 29/10 **L 29/10**		
2001					Pr 29/12 Pa 29/12 **L 29/12**	Pa 17/4
2002						Pr 9-10/3 **L 28-29/9[b]**
2003			Pa 20-21/9			**L 30-31/8[a]**
Next L	May 2004	Nov 2005	Unknown	Nov 2005	Dec 2004	Unknown

Pr = Presidential Elections; Pa = Parliamentary Elections; R = Regional Council Elections/Provincial Legislature; L = Local Elections.

a Elections for Urban Councils. Elections for the City Council of Harare had been held on the 9-10/3/2002.

b Elections for Rural District Councils.

Electoral systems at the local level

There is a huge variety of electoral systems at the local level. Electoral systems at the local level may be more complex than those at the national level, because local authorities are usually more heterogeneous in terms of number of inhabitants, size, structures, responsibilities, and functions.

International experience suggests that the objective of greater voter participation in the selection of political personnel is often more important at the local than at the national level, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the reduced scale of territorial space in which elections are held implies that the voter is more familiar with the political problems of, and possible solutions to, public affairs.

Secondly, the characteristics of the candidate as a known person may have a greater influence on the voters' electoral behaviour than in national elections.

In many Southern African countries, the need to operate transparent and simple electoral systems at the local level has led to the introduction of ward systems of representation with a plurality electoral system (i.e. the candidate who gets the greatest number of votes is elected, normally applied within single-member constituencies).[17] In most cases this electoral system is also applied to elections for the national parliament. It is therefore no surprise that in Mauritius the plurality system in three-member constituencies implemented at the national level, is also applied at the local level, although in constituencies of variable size and without the unique best-loser system existing at national elections.[18] In a similar way, Mozambique uses the same variant of the Proportional Representation (PR) system at both the national and the local level. This system provides for party lists in constituencies of varying size, with voters voting for party lists instead of candidates. Seats are distributed to political parties according to the share of votes that the party receives in a given constituency.[19]

17 'Traditional' forms of voting (such as line voting, i.e. voters gather in a public place and queue behind their candidate) are still used in the traditional tinkhundla system of Swaziland.

18 The best-loser system is a device to guarantee the representation of ethnic minorities in parliament. Should the percentage of seats won by the different ethnic groups differ from the overall population share of this ethnic group, the Electoral Commission will attribute up to 4 additional seats to those representatives of underrepresented minorities that won the highest percentage of votes in all constituencies without having been elected to parliament (therefore: best losers). For more details see Mathur (1997). The Mauritian parliament is currently considering a major reform of the electoral system. There is a general consensus to adopt the recommendations of an international expert commission headed by the South African Albie Sachs to complement the current plurality system and additional best-loser seats (62+8 seats) with 30 seats elected from national party lists (with a threshold of 10%). Details are still discussed in Parliament, and the local elections (originally scheduled for 2004) might have been postponed to 2006 due to uncertainty with regard to the electoral rules to be applied (i.e. the extension of the new system also to the local level).

19 Sub-types of proportional representation are distinguished according to the size of the constituency, the specific mathematical formula applied (divisor or quota systems) and the existence of artificial thresholds that exclude parties from seat allocation having not reached a specified percentage of the overall votes' share. For a good introduction to PR systems see Nohlen (1996) and Farrell (2001). In Mozambique the d'Hondt type of electoral formula is applied for both the national and local elections.

Table 4: Features of Local Government Electoral Systems in Southern Africa[a]

	Term of Office (Years)	Electoral System for Councillors	Same Electoral System applied in National Elections?
Botswana	5	Plurality in SMC	Yes
Lesotho	5	Plurality in SMC	No (MMP)
Malawi	5	Plurality in SMC	Yes
Mauritius	5	Plurality in MMC	Yes
Mozambique	5	PR	Yes
Namibia	5	PR / Plurality in SMC[b]	Yes / No (PR)[b]
South Africa	5	MMP[c]	No (PR)
Tanzania	5	Plurality in SMC	Yes
Zambia	3	Plurality in SMC	Yes
Zimbabwe	4	Plurality in SMC	Yes

MMC = Multi-Member Constituency; MMP = Mixed-Member Proportional System; PR = Proportional Representation; SMC = Single-Member Constituency.
a In Angola, DR Congo, and Swaziland no local elections have been held so far.
b For Local Elections a PR system is applied (Hare quota with largest remainder), for the Regional Elections a plurality system is applied in single-member constituencies. Namibia has thus the same electoral system for national parliament and local councils, but a different system for regional council elections.
c Mixed-Member Proportional System. Voters have two votes, one vote for ward candidates (50% of seats), and one vote for party lists (50% of seats). The total seat distribution is according to Proportional Representation. The constituency winners are then subtracted from the seat total of the respective party. Remaining seats are filled from the party lists. In local councils with fewer than 7 councillors, no ward candidates are elected, and voters have a single vote for a party list (PR). Within the PR calculation, Hare quota with largest remainder is applied.

Some countries have opted, at least temporarily, for a mix of electoral systems. In Namibia, different electoral formulas were applied for regional and local elections in the period following independence. While the government for many years advocated the general introduction of majoritarian electoral systems at sub-national level, the status quo has been maintained at least for the elections to come: Plurality system for the regional councils, Proportional Representation for both the national elections to Parliament and for the local council elections. It has to be stressed, however, that the two PR systems are very different. At national level it is applied in one national constituency with 72 MPs (and without any thresholds), whereas nearly all Namibian local councils consist of seven councillors, which strongly reduces the proportional effect of the PR system.[20] The 'ma-

20 Due to the small size of constituencies the seat' share of parties might not reflect their share of votes, especially in the case of minority parties. For a more detailed discussion of the distorting effects of PR in small constituencies with examples from Namibia see the excellent contribution of Keulder (2002).

jority-prime' systems applied in some Francophone African countries - the party that wins most of the votes is automatically granted a majority of council seats, and the remaining seats are distributed among other parties on the basis of proportional representation – is unknown in Southern Africa.

In post-Apartheid South Africa, a combined system of plurality system in former township areas and proportional representation in former white areas was initially applied in the 1995 local elections. The transformation of local government before the second local elections in 2000 also brought with it a change in the electoral system. A so-called Mixed-Member Proportional System was introduced, where 50% of the seats are elected from single-member constituencies by plurality system, and the remaining 50% are filled from party-lists.[21] The overall logic of the system is proportional representation, as the party seats compensate for disproportionalities caused by the plurality system (see note [c] under table 4 and the detailed analysis of the South African local electoral system given by de Visser / Steytler / Mettler 2000).[22] The seat calculation starts from the total share of votes that political parties and their candidates get in both the plurality and the PR election, and is thus different from the additional party lists applied in some African countries such as Senegal or Tanzania.[23]

Representation at the local level. Who may run in local elections?

Who is allowed to run in local elections? Candidature provisions are often of decisive importance, as they define who is permitted to participate in the local political competition. Generally some incompatibility rules apply, e.g. preventing somebody from holding several public offices simultaneously. Here it is of particular interest if national *and* local offices may be compatible, and if there are any obligations with regard to residence in the municipality or district. Of major importance in some of the countries are formal educational requirements that have to be met before councillors are allowed to effectively participate in the council's decision-making. At the same time they may, especially at the local level, exclude the participation of popular candidates.

21 Councils with less than seven councillors are using a pure PR system.
22 The pure PR system currently applied for the national parliamentary elections in South Africa is deficient with regard to the accountability of parliamentarians (and has therefore come under criticism, see the Report of the van Zyl Slabbert Commission (Electoral Task Team) on the website of the South African Electoral Commission).
23 In the additional party list system, a defined quota of seats is distributed according to PR to party lists in one national constituency, while the majority of seats is elected from single-member (or multi-member) constituencies according to plurality system.

Elected local councils normally enter a political space which is already occupied by other established and relatively more powerful structures, such as local party organisations, members of parliament for that constituency in the national legislature, field agencies of various ministries, traditional leaders, or local development committees in which party members and field officers of various ministries predominate over the representatives, if any, from the elected councils. Two types of political actors need to be analysed in greater detail, whose role in the local political competition differs considerably between SADC states: Political parties and traditional leaders.

In nearly all countries, independent candidates may run in local elections, or political parties may present lists or candidates. In Namibia, political associations that do not fulfil the criteria in order to be recognised as political parties, may nevertheless run in local elections.

In most of the countries considered here, elected local government structures are entrusted with the control and / or management of resources, including land, and the provision of basic services to the communities. At the same time, nearly all these countries also have traditional institutions operating at the local level. Both traditional and elected authorities have an interest in developing the local community. However, if their functions and duties are not harmonised, overlaps between their activities and resulting conflicts can be extremely detrimental to the local community. SADC countries have adopted different approaches (cf. Hlatshwayo 1995).[24] There are either laws in place or strong sentiments against allowing traditional leaders to combine traditional and competitive political leadership roles. Such prohibitions were generally meant to prevent traditional leaders from abusing their positions to gain unfair political advantage. Because traditional leaders are, by definition, linked to particular ethnic groupings, political cleavages along ethnic lines are likely to occur if traditional leaders were given the freedom to engage in party politics. But that has not re-

24 Regulated Dualism occurs where traditional structures and elected councils exist, by law, side by side and are equal to and independent of each other, i.e. they operate parallel to each other (Botswana with its three local government structures, namely Tribal Administration, Land Boards and District Councils). Within Non-regulated Dualism neither the activities of traditional nor of elected structures are regulated, or only the activities of one institution (usually the elected structures) is governed by law and the activities of the other institution are not, the law being silent on the matter (In Zambia, although both the local government and chiefs' affairs portfolios fall under the same government ministry, there is no relationship between chiefs and local government under current law. The immediate effect of this situation is constant overlap of leadership responsibilities between elected and traditional leaders in relation to local communities). Within the Subordination Approach either the traditional authorities (usually) or elected local authority councils or organs (rarely) are made subordinate and answerable to the other institution. One example is Namibia where according to the Traditional Authorities Act of 1995 in case of conflict between traditional authority and a local authority council the powers of local authority shall prevail.

sulted in their exclusion from politics altogether. They can be elected by their peers into the reserved positions or may be nominated to these positions, in countries where such provisions are in place (Botswana, Lesotho, Zimbabwe[25], South Africa). Alternatively, they can abdicate their traditional leadership and compete as ordinary citizens (Tanzania, Zambia). In Namibia the Traditional Authorities Act explicitly states that any traditional leader is prevented from allowing his political opinions or allegiance to influence members of his traditional community.

Table 5: Candidature provisions for local councils

	Role of Political Parties	Formal Role of Traditional Leaders
Botswana	Independent candidates allowed	Reserved positions, quota defined by the ministry, their number should not exceed elected councillors
Lesotho	Independent candidates allowed	Quota with separate election for reserved seats
Malawi	Independent candidates allowed	All chiefs hold ex officio seats in local councils, but without voting powers
Mauritius	Independent candidates allowed. At village council elections no formal party affiliation	No traditional leaders
Mozambique	Independent candidates allowed	None[a]
Namibia	Only political parties and local political associations	Allowed as candidates in regional elections, but not in local elections.
South Africa	Independent candidates allowed	Quota of up to 10% of elected members.
Tanzania	Independent candidates allowed	None
Zambia	Independent candidates allowed	None
Zimbabwe	Independent candidates allowed	Reserved positions, number not fixed; alternatively may abdicate and run as ordinary candidates.

a Local elections are only held for urban councils; the institutional arrangements at the local level thus keep rural populations in the hands of central state agents - and of traditional leaders.

Effects of local elections rules

What is the benefit of studying these institutions in detail? Institutionalism assumes that such rules modify the political behaviour of actors, and that, by creating distinct institutional arrangements, specific rules set specific incentives that differ from other sets of rules. It is beyond the scope of this paper to systematically analyse the impact of the electoral rules for all Southern African countries. The impact of some recently modified institutions (especially electoral systems,

25 In 1995 the Local Government Minister in Zimbabwe appointed more than half of the total number of Chiefs in Rural District Councils; additionally they had the option to stand as candidates in the regular elections together with ordinary citizens.

but also the overall local government dispensation in South Africa) may only become discernible in coming years, when the specific incentives of new rules will show a more enduring impact on elite and voter behaviour.

The main purpose of this contribution consists in collecting and making available comprehensive data on local electoral rules in the SADC countries, which may serve as a basis for other researchers to study specific aspects and impacts for selected countries in greater detail. In the remaining part of this article, these likely impacts are briefly discussed, as is the probable effect of local electoral institutions in specific country settings. The following are thus tentative conclusions, which require further empirical investigation. The section is divided in accordance with two different perspectives, i.e. the impact on local and national politics, respectively.

Local elections and local democratisation

What is the impact of local elections on political change at the local level? In countries with deeply entrenched traditions of non-democratic rule, the mere fact of holding elections will not change the political culture within a short time. Elected councils will certainly have difficulties in asserting their role in the presence of other powerful local actors that have no interest in social or political change. Local elections will in some countries serve as powerful mechanisms for the adjustment and revitalization of patronage and rent-seeking (Bierschenk 2003). The introduction of formal political participation in contexts of scarce resources and capacities will in some cases even strengthen non-elected bodies or lead to the full-fledged re-centralization of political decision-making at the national level. In some South African provinces, provincial governments, due to the financial and management breakdown of municipalities, have successively - albeit temporarily - reassumed control over a number of local councils (cf. Tapscott 2001).

But the institutionalisation of local elections may also represent a first step towards establishing the principle of accountability in local government, strengthening the democratic constraints on political rule, and advancing the consolidation of local political communities. It seems that some of these processes are well under way in the countries of Southern Africa, and the debates about the relationship of traditional rulers and elected councils is just one example of this. The introduction of local elections is a major challenge to traditional rule, and even where chiefs have been successful in securing their participation in councils, the institution of chieftaincy will not be the same as before (cf. van Kessel / Oomen 1997, Hofmeister / Scholz 1997, Munro 2001). There are many indications, from countries as different as Malawi and South Africa, that, in the

course of this process, the institution of chiefdom is politicised and will eventually lose part of the legitimacy that is inherent to this role.

The role that political parties may play in the African context will become much clearer if local democratic politics is maintained. National parties still dominate local decision-making processes – and decisions about the candidature of councillors and mayors are often taken in party headquarters or Prime Ministers' Offices. The indirect election of mayors in most countries reflects not only their restricted competencies, but also the interest of (national) political parties to monitor the selection of the top management of urban areas. At the same time, there is a large number of independent candidates and growing evidence of an emerging role for locally driven political groups, such as citizens' and ratepayers' associations, that win seats in local councils (especially in South Africa, but also in Mozambique, Namibia and in Zimbabwe). The survival of these associations may prove that local civil society is more successful at influencing the course of events in the democratised local politics than it has been in national politics, where its political visibility in many countries has been sharply reduced in the past few years. Plurality (ward) systems should generally make life easier for independent local groups, as it may be easier to get a popular candidate elected in a single-member constituency than assuring representation in a PR election, where votes are counted according to lists. But these groups are actually most successful in the countries where PR systems are applied, the main reason for this probably being the winner-takes-all character of plurality systems. Plurality systems in local elections may also lead to greater numbers of uncontested seats, which should be seen as inherently negative for the institutionalisation of democratic local politics.

While there is little doubt that the lack of elected local institutions makes devolution and democratic local governance illusory, it is much harder to empirically prove, vice versa, that the introduction of democratic local elections automatically leads to better local governance. Even where democratic elections are held continuously (as in Mauritius), local councils may lack the competencies and resources to make a difference for the lives of their local populations. In other cases, elected local councils may have the competencies, but lack the resources to actually implement policies in the area of their jurisdiction (Namibia). Such constellations seriously undermine the legitimacy of elected institutions and are an obstacle to the emergence of effective local governance.

Table 6: Some effects of local electoral institutions

Institutional elements	Intended effect	Real side-effects (tentative)[a]
Additional Level of Regional councils	Better coordination of development planning Higher degree of political inclusion and legitimacy	Political control of regions by opposition parties (NA)
Nation-wide Approach	Strengthening of rural regions (psychological and material)	Breakdown of local government due to lack of resources and capacities (SA)
Direct Election of Mayor	Accountability, Political Leadership	Institutional deadlock (ZW)
Non-elected councillors	Strong presence of traditional chiefs; better linkage to national MPs	Clientelistic Relationship of local councillors to MPs (MW)
Simultaneity of local and national elections	Cost-neutrality; Competition over national issues	Political control of local and district councils by opposition (BO)
Irregularity of local elections	Low relevance of local politics	Low turn-out (MW; MU)
PR systems	Strengthening of parties and minorities	Boycott by political parties (MZ)
Plurality systems (in wards)	Weakness of (smaller) political parties	High percentage of uncontested elections (ZM)
Formal Inclusion of Traditional Leaders	Consensual Decision-Making	Politicisation of traditional leaders (SA)

a BO = Botswana ; MU = Mauritius; MW = Malawi; MZ = Mozambique; NA = Namibia; SA = South Africa; ZM = Zimbabwe.

Local elections and national democratisation

In the national democratisation process, elections at the local level were rarely considered as a priority, and new local administrations were established without the consent of the population. Administrative decisions and legal rules were often enacted after considerable time, sometimes only after the second regular national elections held under the new Constitution (like in Zambia or Malawi), or they have still not been enacted (like in Lesotho). A slightly different case is Tanzania, where the introduction of multiparty politics was tested first in local elections in 1994, before being applied in the national elections of 1995.[26]

26 Other priorities dictated the course of events in countries where populist regimes came to power through civil war or military coups, such as Uganda. During the guerrilla the National Resistance Movement had started to build up local administrations in the territories under their control and even held elections. Following the military victory they tried to establish this model (of holding regional and local elections) in the whole country, as they were not sure to be able to win in competitive national elections. The regular holding of local and regional elections thus served to build up new political movements that are able to

It should, however, not be concluded that local elections are of little relevance. The non-holding or irregular holding of such elections may be explained by lack of resources and interest, but also by the political fall-out they may cause at the national (and local) level (see Weimer 1999 for Mozambique). Local elections held separately from the national polls (as is the case in most SADC countries) may present the government with a veritable challenge relating to national politics. Local polls may directly indicate the popularity (or otherwise) of the national government, especially if the total population is voting in local elections (the uniform approach in table 1), especially where party affiliation is indicated on the ballot papers (as in Namibia and South Africa). This 'test'-character of local elections is one major reason why local elections are often held one year after the national elections (Malawi, Mauritius, South Africa, Zimbabwe): The government is likely to have consolidated its grip on the administration by then, but the frustration with regard to unfulfilled election promises may still be relatively weak.

Elected local institutions may function as training grounds for both young politicians and inexperienced voters. In some countries of the region, council membership and the mayoral office are decisive stages in political careers. This impact may be limited if different legal and educational requirements apply at local and national level (as is the case in Malawi). Sceptical voters may learn in local elections that their influence on decision-making at this level is quite immediate, and that their votes do indeed count. They may thus gain more trust in electoral processes in general.

Local elections may also be of importance in allowing the national opposition to control municipalities and regional councils (vertical power-sharing). In a context of dominant party-systems (Bogaards 2000), opposition parties may thus get access to resources, prepare their personnel for assuming high public offices, and present a more convincing challenge to the national government by having shown a certain degree of legitimacy and support at the local or regional level (cf. Botswana, Mauritius, Namibia, South Africa). The importance of local council domination may, of course, vary depending on the type of council. The local politics of the capital city is of crucial importance to the national government, especially where decentralization has given municipal councils competencies for the allocation of land and for the distribution of water and electricity. The successful management of Cape Town by the national opposition Democratic Alliance hurt the ruling African National Congress much more than the DA presence in national Parliament. On the other hand, any government is probably

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compete with established parties. Revolutionary regimes in the SADC region such as Mozambique and Angola did not follow this 'model', as did Rwanda where national elections were introduced in 2003 after local and regional elections had already been held.

well advised to 'grant' the opposition such minor successes, thereby integrating it into the political process (and to some extent controlling it) without risking any loss of political dominance. In this regard, the lack of resources at the local level, underlined by donors and activists, may be the intentional outcome of incumbent central government strategies.

Conclusion

There is little doubt that the dynamics of national and local politics vary with factors that have less to do with electoral institutions than with the competencies given to decentralized units of government, and that determine the stakes of competition. Other determining factors are the size and urban-rural setting of the country concerned. In small countries like Mauritius, local government is strongly intertwined with national politics, while the rural and peripheral regions of Namibia or Mozambique are quite remote from the capital city, and hence from the political strategies of the main national actors. Formal institutions are also complemented in many instances by informal rules (see Bayart 1993, Chabal / Daloz 1999, Bierschenk / Olivier de Sardan 2003). National members of parliament may thus become important stakeholders in local politics, independently from their formal inclusion in local councils. Town clerks and Chief Executive Officers may dominate local decision-making beyond their administrative roles.

In many countries there is considerable mistrust concerning the skills and integrity of elected local councillors. Central ministry agents tend to argue that increasing the competencies and resources of local government should go along with limiting the patronage capacities of elected councils. From this perspective, the accountability of local councils to both the coordinating and tutelary central agencies and to their electorates becomes a crucial issue. The precise solutions for these problems have to be sought inter alia in the electoral rules discussed in this paper.

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Zusammenfassung

Vor dem Hintergrund der Demokratisierungsprozesse im südlichen Afrika hat die Regulierung des politischen Wettbewerbs auch auf der lokalen Ebene in den letzten Jahren an Bedeutung gewonnen. Der Beitrag systematisiert die verstreuten Informationen über die Reformen der Kommunalverfassung und lokale Wahlen in allen SADC-Ländern. Dabei werden sowohl die Typen von gewählten Institutionen, das Zusammenwirken von gewählten und ernannten Ratsmitgliedern, die Rolle der Bürgermeister, die Regelmäßigkeit der Durchführung von Wahlen, die Wahlsysteme und das passive Wahlrecht näher beleuchtet. In einem zweiten Schritt werden einige Hypothesen zu den möglichen Auswirkungen der in den SADC-Ländern stark variierenden institutionellen Regelungen sowohl für die Demokratisierung der Lokalpolitik als auch Rückwirkungen auf die nationale Ebene diskutiert.

Schlüsselwörter

Kommunalwahlen, Südliches Afrika, Kommunalpolitik, Dezentralisierung, Politische Institutionen, Lokale Räte, Gemeindeverfassung, Wahlsysteme, Politische Parteien

Résumé

Dans le contexte des processus de démocratisation dans la région de l'Afrique australe les activités des institutions locales élues ont également attiré l'attention des observateurs. Beaucoup d'états ont reformé leur systèmes gouvernementales à l'échelle locale. L'article présente un sommaire des règles en vigueur dans tous les états de la région: On trouve donc un aperçu systématique des institutions élues et des dispositions réglant la candidature et le mode de scrutin. Sur la base de cette collection de données de base quelques hypothèses sont avancées sur les effets des institutions locales aussi bien sur la démocratisation de la vie politique locale que sur les processus politiques nationaux.

Mots clés

démocratie locale, élections communales, Afrique australe, conseil municipal, institutions politiques, modes de scrutin, partis politiques

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